

The Grim Meathook Future

In the technology industry we have a phrase. We call it the “grim meathook future”, after [a brilliant piece by Joshua Ellis](#):

I think the problem is that the future, maybe for the first time since WWII, lies on the far side of an event horizon for us, *because* there are so many futures possible. There's the wetware future, the hardware future, the transhumanist future, the post-rationalist (aka fundamentalist) future.

And then there's the future where everything just sort of keeps going on the way it has, with incremental changes, and technology is no longer the deciding factor in things. You don't need high tech to change the world; you need Semtex and guns that were designed by a Russian soldier fifty-odd years ago.

Meanwhile, most of the people with any genuine opportunity or ability to effect global change are too busy patting each other on the back at conventions and blue-skying goofy social networking tools that are essentially useless to 95% of the world's population, who live within fifteen feet of everyone they've ever known and have no need to track their fuck buddies with GPS systems. (This, by the way, includes most Americans, quite honestly.)

You can't blame them for this, because it's fun and it's a great way to travel and get paid, but it doesn't actually help solve any real problems, except the problem of media theory grad students, which the rest of the world isn't really interested in solving.

Feeding poor people is useful tech, but it's not very sexy and it won't get you on the cover of *Wired*. Talk about it too much and you sound like an earnest hippie. So nobody wants to do that.

They want to make cell phones that can scan your personal measurements and send them real-time to potential sex partners. Because, you know, the fucking Japanese teenagers love it, and Japanese teenagers are clearly the smartest people on the planet.

The upshot of all of this is that the Future gets divided; the cute, insulated future that Joi Ito and Cory Doctorow and you and I inhabit, and the **grim meathook future** that most of the world is facing, in which they watch their squats and under-developed fields get turned into a giant game of Counterstrike between crazy faith-ridden jihadist motherfuckers and crazy faith-ridden American redneck motherfuckers, each doing their best to turn the entire world into one type of fascist nightmare or another.

Of course, nobody really wants to talk about that future, because it's depressing and not fun and doesn't have Fischerspooner doing the soundtrack. So everybody pretends they don't know what the future holds, when the unfortunate fact is that — unless we start paying very serious attention — it holds what the past holds: a great deal of extreme boredom punctuated by occasional horror and the odd moment of grace.

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